

**LEARNERS' PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS EXPLICIT AND  
IMPLICIT GRAMMAR TEACHING OF PAST TENSE VERB  
RULES**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of Year 6 learners on explicit and implicit teachings of Past Tense verb rules. It also aimed to find out the learners' point of view towards both teaching methods in helping them to write. For the purpose of this study, a pre-test, a number of treatments lessons, a post-test, and an interview were conducted on twenty selected Year 6 learners in Sekolah Kebangsaan Bandar Seri Alam (1). It is discovered that explicit teaching of grammar rules works effectively better on second language learners due to several reasons; lack of confidence, feeling insecure and examination. In addition to that, from the interview conducted with the selected learners, it is established that the learners put more favor in explicit teaching of grammar rules, due to the fact that they need to construct grammatically correct sentences in examination. More to the point, results gained from the post tests have clearly shown that learners in taught using explicit teaching method performed better compared to those taught using implicit teaching method.

## **ABSTRAK**

Kajian ini dilakukan bertujuan untuk mengkaji persepsi murid Tahun 6 terhadap pengajaran tatabahasa (Past Tense rules) dari dua kaedah berbeza; eksplisit dan implisit dalam membantu mereka dalam penulisan. Bagi mencapai objektif dan tujuan untuk kajian yang dijalankan, pra ujian telah dijalankan diikuti dengan beberapa sesi pengajaran dan pembelajaran. Setelah itu, pos ujian (sama seperti pra ujian) dan temu ramah telah dijalankan ke atas dua puluh murid Tahun 6 yang dipilih di Sekolah Kebangsaan Bandar Seri Alam (1). Berdasarkan kajian – kajian yang telah dilakukan oleh ahli akademik yang lain, pengajaran tatabahasa secara eksplisit didapati lebih efektif terutama bagi pelajar bahasa kedua. Selain itu, berdasarkan temuramah yang dijalankan ke atas murid – murid Tahun 6, mereka juga berpendapat bahawa pengajaran tatabahasa secara eksplisit lebih diperlukan kerana peperiksaan memerlukan mereka mengaplikasikan banyak tatabahasa dalam penulisan. Tambahan pula, berdasarkan pos ujian yang dijalankan ke atas murid-murid tersebut, keputusan menunjukkan bahawa murid-murid yang diajar menggunakan kaedah eksplisit mendapat peratus yang lebih baik berbanding murid-murid yang diajar menggunakan kaedah implisit.

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# **CHAPTER 1**

## **BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

### **1.0 Introduction**

This chapter discusses the background information of the study. Subsequently, previous research on teachers and learners' attitudes towards explicit and implicit grammar teaching are put forward. The research questions designed for this study and the theoretical framework that serve as guidelines for this study are also presented in this chapter.

Rutherford (1987: 9) points out that grammar is “a necessary component of any language component”. This clearly indicates that grammar plays a vital role in language teaching and learning. According to Siti Rohani (2007), there has been an



on-going debate about grammar in ESL teaching and in studies of second language acquisition. Many second language teachers are experimenting and exploring the best and suitable way to teach grammar to their learners. Siti Rohani (2007) asserts that teaching methods used to teach grammar rules has a significant influence on the development of language teaching practice. As a result, different views, approaches and methodologies to grammar teaching have emerged for ESL teachers to choose to suit their own learners' proficiency level and classroom environment. This subsequently has influenced ESL learners' perceptions and attitudes towards grammar teaching.

Undoubtedly, the use of grammar teaching in the field of second language acquisition has been well studied, but there exists a gap in the literature in regards to learners' perceptions on the teaching of grammar. Second language teachers are often confused with which teaching approach is best and suitable to teach learners the grammar rules in the target language. Brindley's research (1984) on Adult Migrant Education in Australia has found teachers put more favor of communicative activities while learners prefer traditional way of learning grammar. In Malaysian school context, the system puts much focus on examination where learners more often than not, are exposed to the traditional way of teaching grammar, that is, 'drilling'.

In this regard, this study demonstrates a project conducted among twenty Low Proficiency Year 6 Learners in Sekolah Kebangsaan Bandar Seri Alam (1) Johor Bahru regarding the teaching of Past Tense verb rules explicitly and implicitly. This study particularly aimed to establish the perceptions of selected Year 6 learners

towards explicit and implicit teaching of Past Tense verb rules in helping their ability in writing.

### **1.1 Background of the Study**

I have been teaching Year 6 learners in my school for approximately three years. Our Malaysian education system puts much focus on examination where all Year 6 primary school learners will have to seat for a major standardized examination; UPSR (Ujian Penilaian Sekolah Rendah). Therefore, most teachers lay their focus on drilling their learners with the examination format (Paper 1 – Multiple-Choice Questions, Paper 2 – Subjective / Written). This format applies to all four core subjects; Bahasa Malaysia, Mathematics, Science and English Language. In actual fact, the learners will be exposed to and trained with this format once they enter Year 4 of their primary school years. For English Language subject, learners are expected to embrace grammar rules (especially Past Tense) in order to construct sentences and write their essays in the English examination Paper 2 (Question 3). Question 3 in Paper 2 usually requires learners to write a story in Past Tense. Nonetheless, informal feedback from most English teachers in my school demonstrated that though grammar rules are taught explicitly, quite a number of learners are generally weak in grasping the rules thus making them sufficiently incompetent in constructing sentences or writing essays.

Reflecting on my own experience during my primary school years, I distinguished that my classmates and I were coached to memorize the grammar rules using the substitution tables and practice ‘habitual’ activities such as fill in the blanks and complete the sentences with certain grammar rules (Past Tense, Adjectives, and Subject Verb Agreement). Even so, when it comes to sentence constructions, I occasionally faced difficulties as I was lacking the ability to apply the grammar rules I had learnt into writing my sentences. Not only that, some of my friends and I were rather incompetent to communicate using the target language.

During my practicum teaching for six months in a primary school, I was given three classes of Year 5 to teach. After three months, I could perceive that most of the learners were relatively skilled in using the substitution tables to complete drilling activities in grammar yet they somewhat thought and found constructing sentences tedious, complicated and confusing. It was an upsetting experience for me as a practicum teacher when I identified this as a major problem in English language teaching and learning. What’s more frustrating, when I conducted communicative language activities, many of them did not participate due to several reasons such as low proficiency level and feeling insecure that they would make mistakes during the activities.

Based on these existing setbacks and experiences, I am driven to conduct this study to distinguish learners’ perspectives and attitudes towards explicit and implicit grammar teaching; which approach that the learners feel helps them in learning and embracing the target language better. More to the point, as an English teacher in a

primary school, this study to a certain extent, would serve as guidelines for me and other teachers to think of alternative pedagogical strategies to overcome the inadequacies occurred.

## **1.2 Statement of Problem**

In this study, the researcher intended to delve into learners' points of view towards explicit and implicit teaching of grammar rules. Feedback from most English teachers in the respective school (Sekolah Kebangsaan Bandar Seri Alam 1) showed that these teachers teach grammar rules explicitly to their learners in view of the fact that learners are to be prepared for examination. For this study, Past Tense verb rules was particularly chosen because Question 3 in English examination Paper 2 usually requires learners to write a story in Past Tense. However, based on their result in Year 5 Final English examination paper (Paper 2), quite a number of learners were found to be generally weak in grasping the rules. These learners are weak in applying Past Tense verb rules into writing as they find it confusing and tedious.

More to the point, based on the informal feedback from some of the English teachers from the respective school, though some of the teachers put more favor on exposing their learners to communicative activities; many learners seem to feel

insecure and incompetent to participate in the lessons if taught implicitly. In this study, the researcher intended to seek learners' perceptions towards explicit teaching of Past Tense verb rules. Most previous studies in second language acquisition have proven that learners prefer and need explicit teaching of grammar rules as it serves as guidance for them in learning the target language.

The researcher also planned to find out which approach may be more helpful in improving learners' ability in writing. Many studies conducted previously focus more on teachers' attitudes, views and beliefs in grammar teaching. Nonetheless, there might be discrepancies between teachers' beliefs and learners' perceptions towards grammar teaching. Hence, the study intends to distinguish from the perspectives of the learners; either explicit or implicit teaching of grammar rules is more useful and beneficial in helping them to write better.

### **1.3 Purpose of the Study**

The main purpose of this study was to examine how Year 6 learners perceive explicit and implicit teachings of Past Tense verb rules help their ability in writing and later to distinguish the learners' preference towards the teaching of Past Tense verb rules; explicitly or implicitly. This study also seeks to discover the sights from

the learners as clients to the teaching methods applied by teachers in grammar teaching.

#### **1.4 Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of this particular study are:

- To identify the learners' perceptions towards explicit teaching of Past Tense verb rules
- To identify the learners' perceptions towards implicit teaching of Past Tense verb rules
- To discover which approach; explicit and implicit, is more effective in helping the learners to use Past Tense verb rules in writing

### **1.5 Research Questions**

A number of research questions were formulated for the purpose of this study. The research questions are;

1. What are the learners' perceptions towards explicit teaching of Past Tense verb rules?
2. What are the learners' perceptions towards implicit teaching of Past Tense verb rules?
3. Between the two approaches; explicit and implicit, which is more effective in helping the learners to use Past Tense verb rules in their writings?

## **1.6 Significance of the Study**

In view of the fact that the Malaysian education system puts much focus on examination, most schools' focal point is to ensure that learners produce excellent results in examination. While many teachers put great effort to guarantee excellent grades for the schools, parents want to guarantee that their children attain good result and get to be in the first class in their schools. Thus, this study may be significant to schools, teachers, parents and learners in order to develop and improve the quality of our education system, teaching practices, and how parents and learners acknowledge the purpose of education as a whole.

One of the researcher's main concerns when conducting this study is that, many language teachers wonder if language learners would be able to comprehend the rules of grammar and later utilize the knowledge in their writing skills. As a matter of fact, learners' performances throughout the learning process in the target language play a vast impact on teachers. In the researcher's school, most English teachers seem to face the same problem where many pupils are not able to apply the grammar rules they learn into their writings. Pazaver and Wang (2009) point out that teacher's classroom practices when teaching grammar rules are relatively influential to learners.



Furthermore, some learners struggle to comprehend grammar rules because they acquire low proficiency in the target language. Thus, they distinguish learning grammar rules in the target language a burden and troublesome. Thus, this perception has challenged second language teachers to make grammar teaching palatable and more effective. It is a turning point for linguists and language educators to review the role of grammar in language teaching (Celce – Murcia, 1991).

### **1.7 Scope of the Study**

This study primarily encompasses the perceptions among the learners (selected Year 6 pupils from the respective school which has 259 Year 6 learners) in relation to teaching Past Tense verb rules explicitly and implicitly; which is more effective in helping their ability in writing. Ten samples of each group from the pre and post tests conducted on the selected learners were collected and analyzed to distinguish how the teaching of Past Tense verb rules explicitly and implicitly help their ability in writing. An interview was also conducted with the selected learners to identify how they undertake the teaching of Past Tense verb rules in classrooms.

## 1.8 Definition of Terms

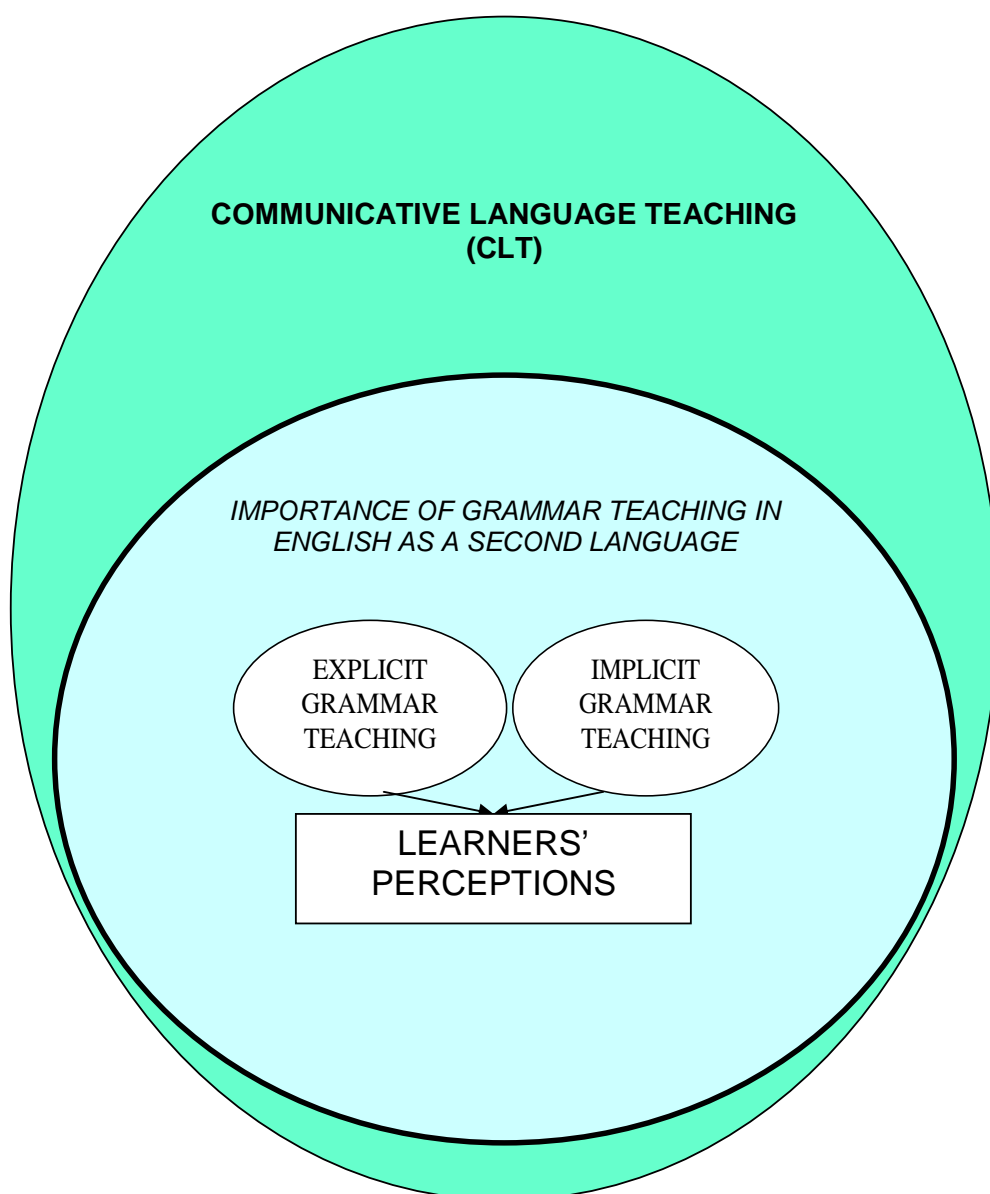
The important terms used throughout this study are as follows:

- **Communicative Language Teaching (CLT):** Communicative Language Teaching, derived from functional linguists in Europe during the 1970s, proposes a functional-notional syllabus based on needs assessment and sets up a threshold level of language ability which learners should be able to do with language (Lynch, 2005).
- **Grammar:** Chittravelu, Sithamparam and Soo Choon (1995:196) defines grammar as “the rules of a language, concerning the way in which words are put together to convey meaning in different contexts”.
- **Perceptions:** The understanding or knowledge gotten by perceiving, or a specific idea, concept, impression. It means the act of perceiving; by means of the senses, awareness or comprehension (Siti Rohani, 2007).
- **Explicit grammar teaching:** Explicit grammar teaching is defined by Canale and Swain (1980) as the process of providing the learners with direct input

(rules) which includes grammar instructions, drilling, mimicry and memorization.

- **Implicit grammar teaching:** Lynch (2005) defines implicit grammar teaching as providing input in context and learners are exposed to substantial doses of grammar rules without alienating them to the learning of English Language.
- **Comprehensible Input:** Comprehensible Input (CI) is based on Krashen's Input Hypothesis which states that 'human acquire language in only one way which by understanding the messages or receiving the comprehensible input' (Krashen, 1967).

## 1.9 Theoretical Framework



This theoretical framework shows the teaching methodology that has been practiced by our Malaysian Education System and the importance of grammar

teaching in English as Second Language. This study aimed to identify learners' perceptions towards explicit and implicit teaching of grammar.

### **1.10 Conclusion**

Overall, this study mainly intended to find out learners' point of view towards both teaching methods; explicit and implicit teachings of Past Tense verb rules. It is also to study which method may be more helpful in improving learners' ability in writing.

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